

Fighting back by looking good



The next wig she grabs from the white Styrofoam head is jet black with a razor cut.

“I always wanted to be goth!” She cracks up at herself but then really smiles as she tries on the next, a blond and brown number that’s longer in the back. “Now, I could have fun with this one. Yeah, I like this.”

While three of the women here are bald (nothing has grown past a quarter inch anyway), they also laugh, smile, commiserate and encourage as one woman experiments with various headgear. She volunteered to be the model, so they try wigs, scarves, even an orange T-shirt that’s tied to look like a turban.

Everyone here came to Liberty Hospital today for the “Look Good... Feel Better” program from the American Cancer Society. The class teaches female cancer patients beauty tips to combat the damaging effects of chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

And right now, they do seem to feel better. When the class began, the women sat quietly, a little nervous. But slowly, as they dug through their gift bag of cosmetics, the mood became less about cancer and more about fun.

“That’s a good color for you!” The esthetician for today’s class moves

from table to table, giving suggestions on eye shadow and eyeliner. “If you do the outside corner, it’ll make your eyes look bigger.”

Janice Frizzell was fortunate enough to keep her hair during her numerous chemo treatments, but she takes advantage of the makeup tips she’s learning. A 47-year-old colon cancer survivor from Holt, Mo., she still battles the side effects of her disease – and the treatments.

“I sometimes feel like a 90-year-old grandma trying to get out of bed in the morning,” she said. “It’s not as simple as having surgery and getting over it, going through a few chemo treatments and getting over it. There are a lot of effects from it.”

All the women here are dealing with their own set of side effects, something that makes a simple task like applying makeup a little more challenging – especially when you lack facial features the rest of us take for granted.

“I forgot where my eyebrows were,” one woman comments aloud. She suffers from hair loss, including her eyebrows and lashes, but with a few handy tricks on how to draw them back on, they look quite real. “I don’t think they match though!”

But after all of the missteps of uneven eyebrows and funny wigs, the women relearn how to do something they’ve done most of their lives.

“Being with the women and watching their transformation is motivating



Mary Johnson ponders how she looks in a flowered head scarf in the Look Good... Feel Better class, designed to teach beauty tips to women battling cancer.

and inspiring,” said Lindsay Healy, a community manager with the American Cancer Society and today’s class leader. “The hope and courage in the room is remarkable. A lot of the women come in to the class looking defeated and not feeling like themselves anymore. It’s truly amazing in two hours to watch them open up, start smiling, and develop courage they didn’t have before.”

Mary Johnson ended up getting that blond and brown wig after all, and she confirms that the class truly was inspiring.

“It brought my spirits up quite a bit. I wish everybody would take the opportunity to go do it. I almost

didn’t, thinking I was too late into it, but my family talked me into going. It was nice to get out with people that had the same thing you were going through.”

The Kansas City, Mo., resident is battling uterine cancer and as of today’s class will soon finish chemotherapy and then move on to radiation. She’s ready.

“It showed me that even though I didn’t lose my eyebrows yet, I feel more confident that when I do I know how to put ‘em on!”

The free class is offered in all 50 states, and every attendee leaves with a free makeup kit with brand-name cosmetics. But Healy said it’s

the support of other women that really gives the class its true value.

“As women we are notorious for putting everyone else before ourselves. This class allows for women to put themselves first, which is a vital part of recovery. The session helps them feel special, beautiful and feminine again, and it gives them a chance to forget about the treatment they are enduring. If every woman going through cancer treatment has the opportunity to attend a class, I think it’s a must!”

For future classes at Liberty Hospital, see Page 12. For more information, visit www.libertyhospital.org or www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org, or call 800-395-LOOK.